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Edlin Veras
Georgia State University, everas@student.clayton.edu

Jason Davis Dr
Clayton State University, jasondavis@clayton.edu

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Examining Aggravated Assault on College Campuses: A Differential Association Approach

Cover Page Footnote

Please address all correspondence to Jason Davis, Department of Social Sciences, 2000 Clayton State Blvd, Morrow, Georgia 30260. Email: JasonDavis@Clayton.edu. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Georgia Sociological Association held at North Georgia College and State University in Dahlonega, Georgia. The authors would like to acknowledge Dr. Rafik Mohamed for his advice and comments on earlier drafts of the paper. We would also like to thank anonymous reviewers for their comments and recommendations.

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Keywords: Differential association, assault, crime on college campus

ABSTRACT

Despite its status as the most common violent crime committed on college campuses, very little is known about factors that cause students to participate in aggravated assault. In this paper, we offer a theoretical proposal that utilizes Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory to better anticipate factors that may contribute to assault. In general, we propose that students that hold favorable definitions of crime and less conventional attitudes will be more inclined to participate in assault. At the same time, we postulate that students that have deviant peer associations would be more likely to commit an aggravated assault on campus as would students that anticipate that they would not lose respect their closest associates if they personally assaulted another person. Consistent with Sutherland's theory, we offer a survey instrumentation that measures key concepts related to favorable definitions, conventionality, peer association, and acceptance. Furthermore, we discuss the best strategies for implementing such a survey. Finally, we conclude by discussing potential limitations of our research design.

INTRODUCTION

Campus crime is a foremost concern for students, parents, college administrators, and surrounding communities (Lane et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 1998; Pezza and Bellotti, 1995). Since the 1990s, a growing body of research has examined this important issue. In general, these studies have focused on student victimization (Baum and Klaus, 2005; Fisher et al., 1998; Hart, 2007; Henson and Stone, 1999; Sloan and Fisher, 1995), drug use and alcohol abuse (Carter and Kahnweiler, 2000; Duncan et al., 2005; Fisher et al., 1998; Kremer and Levy, 2008; McCabe et al., 2005; Pezza and Bellotti, 1995; Shillington et al. 2006; Sloan and Fisher, 1995; Wechsler et al., 2002), student willingness to report campus crime (Hart and Colavito, 2011) and student fear of crime (Fisher, 1995; Fisher et al., 1998; Lane et al., 2009). Other studies have examined broader issues of student deviance including academic dishonesty (Storch and Storch, 2002). There is also a considerable amount of research exploring the effect of peers on criminal activity with particular attention given to the influence of fraternities or athletic teams on criminal behaviors (Boeringer et al., 1991; Boswell and Spade, 1996; Carter and Kahnweiler, 2000; McCabe et al., 2005; Murnen and Kohlman, 2007; Scott-Sheldon et al., 2008; Storch and Storch, 2002). Among violent offenses, sexual assault has understandably garnered extensive attention (Boeringer et al., 1991; Boswell and Spade, 1996; Cass, 2007; Fisher et al., 1999; Mustaine and Tewsbury, 2002; Nurius et al., 1996).

However, little is known about the factors that contribute to aggravated assault on college campuses (Fisher et al., 1998; Roark, 1987; Volkwein et al. 1995). This lack of attention is peculiar given that both reported crime and victimization data indicate that aggravated assault has the highest occurrence rate among all violent crimes categories. Between 2007 and 2009 nearly 40,000 violent offenses were reported on college campuses (US Department of Education,

2012). The majority of these offenses, 38 percent (15,021), were aggravated assault cases. By comparison, robberies accounted for 36 percent (14,145) of reported violent crimes during the same period, while 25 percent (10,032) were forcible sexual assaults. Victimization data yield similar findings; the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) found that nearly 400,000 college students were victims of simple (284,000) or aggravated (106,000) assault between 1995 and 2004 (Hart, 2007). At the same time, 42,000 students were victims of robberies and roughly 30,000 were victims of sexual assault. From 1995 to 2002, the aggravated assault rate among college students aged 18-24 was over three times greater than rape/sexual assault (Baum and Klaus, 2005). Specifically, averages of 14.5 per 1,000 college students were a victim of an aggravated assault, compared to 4.3 per 1,000 students were a victim of a rape.

In an effort to help bridge the divide between the prevalence of aggravated assault on college campuses and the relative absence of research on the subject, the current paper seeks to contribute to the ever expanding campus crime literature by offering a theoretical proposal to better understand factors that may contribute to student-on-student assault in university settings. Specifically, we utilize Edwin Sutherland's theory of differential association to predict how personal believes and peers can influence interpersonal violence. Sutherland's theory posits that criminal behavior is learned through intimate personal groups that provide greater exposure to definitions, attitudes, or justifications favorable to criminality (Matsueda, 1982). Indeed, past research has demonstrated that peers are an especially important influence for college students (Pezza and Bellotti, 1995; Roark, 1988). We anticipate that students who partake in aggressive physical behaviors toward other students on campus will be more likely to be directly affected by the attitudes and behaviors of their closest peers. By understanding the dynamics that influence assaultive behavior, it is possible to help develop prevention strategies to reduce its occurrence

on college campuses. As prior research has noted, increasing awareness and knowledge about violent crime on college campuses is essential for crafting effective policies and procedures to improve the safety of the campus environment (Davis, 1996; Roark, 1988).

In order to accomplish this task, we first briefly review the historical context of crime on colleges and summarize what is known about violence on campuses. Next, we examine the major assertions and concepts of Sutherland's differential association theory. Particular attention will be given to the importance of definitions favorable to deviance, conventionality, peer associations, and acceptance. We then offer a survey instrumentation that captures Sutherland's theoretical concepts. Using this instrumentation as a framework, we offer general hypotheses that discuss anticipated outcomes. We conclude by addressing some potential limitations of our research proposal.

CRIME ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Until the late 1980s, relatively little was known about crime on college campuses. However, the brutal torture, rape, and murder of Jeanne Clery, a 19 year-old Leigh University student, in 1986 made campus crime a matter of national attention. A subsequent grassroots movement initiated by Jeanne's parents, Howard and Connie Clery, sparked federal legislative action to increase transparency regarding crime on campuses and resulted in the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 (Fisher, 1995; Fisher et al., 1998; Sloan and Fisher, 1995; Volkwein et al., 1995). The Clery Act, as it is better known, requires colleges and universities that accept federal financial aid to publish crime data related to Index crimes[1], liquor and drug violations, and weapon related offenses that occur on or near campuses. The Act further

[1] The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) uses the term Index crime to denote a total of eight offenses. The violent offenses include murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, while the property offenses are burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. Arson is also classified as an Index crime (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014).

requires schools to disseminate information about prevention measures and procedures adopted to address crime on campus.

Since the passage of the Clery Act, considerable research has been conducted to better understand factors that contribute to campus crimes. However, relatively little is known about aggravated assault on college campuses and those studies that have examined it have been largely descriptive in nature. A study of violent crime over 400 campuses found that assaults were more common at larger, urban campuses such as medical or health oriented universities (Volkwein et al., 1995). Another study of campus police chiefs' perception of violent crime estimated that firearms are used in approximately 8 percent of all assaults that occur at universities (Thomas et al., 2009). While informative, these studies do not offer a theoretical basis as to why students may engage in physical assaults that are non-sexual in nature. Instead, and certainly understandable given the nature of the crime, research of violence on college campuses has focused on factors that contribute to sexual assault. Theoretically, these more common studies have proffered a routine activities perspective and asserted that college environments are prime settings for sexual assaults given the demographics of students, various social activities that bring offenders and victims together, and accessibility to alcohol or illicit substances (Cass 2007; Fisher et al., 1998; Henson and Stone, 1999; Mustaine and Tewsbury, 2002). Indeed, the presence of alcohol and drugs has consistently shown to influence the likelihood of sexual assault (Pezza and Bellotti, 1995). Other studies have utilized a learning theory approach and identified a positive relationship between all male groups and sexual assault. In general, research has found that males socialized in groups like fraternities or athletic teams are exposed to hypermasculine, aggressive attitudes and behaviors that support and legitimize violence as a means of sexual conquest or solving problems (Boeringer et al., 1991;

Boswell and Spade, 1996; Murnen and Kohlman, 2007). In this paper, we contend that peer association is indeed important and accordingly applicable to the more common campus crime of non-sexual assault. Therefore, because of its aforementioned emphasis on the influence intimate personal groups have on justifying both conforming and non-conforming behavior Edwin Sutherland's (1947) differential association theory is ideally suited for understanding how personal attitudes and peer associations can influence behavior.

EDWIN SUTHERLAND'S DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION THEORY

Differential association offers a useful framework for understanding how group interactions influence individual deviant behavior. Sutherland (1947) developed nine propositions that posit criminal behavior is learned through intimate personal group associations that provide greater exposure to definitions, attitudes, or justifications favorable to criminality. In addition, his theory holds that the frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of these intimate relationships are influential in determining patterns of behavior. The greater the frequency of criminal associations, the longer these associations, the earlier one develops criminal associations and the more important these associations, then there is a greater likelihood of developing attitudes and definitions favorable towards crime and a greater chance of participating in criminal behavior (Sutherland, 1947; Sutherland and Cressey 1978). With its emphasis on learning, differential association offers a general theory of crime that helps explain why people engage in a variety of deviant activities including interpersonal violence. Further, differential association is useful for understanding how normative climates expose people to various criminal definitions or associations. Some communities or groups increase exposure to definitions favorable to crime (Hoffman, 2002). We contend that college campuses potentially represent such an environment. As previously noted, colleges include student body populations

that are more accepting or tolerate of drug use, alcohol abuse, academic dishonesty, and sexual assault (Boeringer et al., 1991; Boswell and Spade, 1996; Carter and Kahnweiler, 2000; Duncan et al., 2005; Fisher et al., 1998; Kremer and Levy, 2008; McCabe et al., 2005; Murnen and Kohlman, 2007; Pezza and Bellotti, 1995; Scott-Sheldon et al., 2008; Shillington et al. 2006; Sloan and Fisher, 1995; Storch and Storch, 2002; and Wechsler et al., 2002). In addition, students within college environments may face greater peer pressure to participate in these deviant acts (Pezza and Bellotti, 1995; Roark, 1987; 1988). In this paper, we address four key concepts of Sutherland's theory including (a) definitions favorable to crime, (b) conventionality, (c) peer association, and (d) peer acceptance.

Definitions favorable to deviance

A main component of differential association is favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward the law as well as criminal behaviors. When someone holds more favorable definitions about crime, then they will be more likely to engage in criminal behavior (Sutherland and Cressey, 1978). Indeed, Tittle et al. (1986) found juveniles who *did not* consider gambling, marijuana use, cheating on taxes, assault, or theft morally wrong or a serious/illegal offense were more likely to engage in delinquency. Similarly, Matsueda (1982) found evidence that excessive criminal definitions predict rates of delinquency. Relying on self-report data from the Richmond Youth Project, he concluded that "increasing the number of favorable definitions to violation of law relative to unfavorable definitions increases delinquent behavior (Matsueda, 1982: 499)." Finally, Hoffman (2002) found that respondents who believed it was acceptable to fight, belong to a gang, destroy school property, bring weapons to school, or use illegal drugs were more likely to participate in deviant acts.

Conventionality

From a differential association standpoint, conventionality refers to the extent to which one agrees with normative behaviors and goals (Hoffman, 2002, Matsueda, 1982). When people value honesty, hard work, legitimate employment, or academic success they are less likely to engage in crime. However, when someone adopts unconventional attitudes that reject these virtues it increases their propensity to commit crime. In a longitudinal study, Hoffman (2002) measured conventionality using a series of questions that asked respondents how important earning good grades, finishing high school, attending college, and studying were to the participants. He discovered that adolescents holding fewer conventional definitions were more likely to be involved in delinquent activities.

Peer association

Differential association maintains that intimate interactions have a direct effect on personal attitudes and behaviors. Greater association with deviant peers exposes one to more favorable definitions of crime (Tittle et al., 1986 and Matsueda, 1982). These favorable definitions serve as a frame of reference for one's own behavior and directly increase the likelihood that a person will engage in crime themselves. To be sure, Tittle et al. (1986) found that greater exposure to deviant peers and attitudes increases the motive to engage in criminal activities and these motives ultimately lead to criminal behavior. In addition, association with peers that have been formally sanctioned or apprehended increases the likelihood of deviance. Respondents who had friends apprehended by the police were most likely to hold favorable definitions of crime and be involved in criminal activities themselves (Matsueda, 1982).

Perceived acceptance

Perceived acceptance refers to the extent to which people believe criminal actions are expected or tolerated by their closest peers (Tittle et al., 1986). When a person feels their criminal acts will be accepted by their associates, they will be inclined to engage in crime. Tittle and his colleagues (1986) measured this concept by asking respondents if they committed a crime how much respect they would lose among people they knew personally. They hypothesized that the prospect of losing peer respect is pivotal in the decision making process and individuals who anticipated that they *would not* loss of respect would be more likely to participate in criminal activity. In the end, they found indirect support for this concept as perceived acceptance influences peer association which in turn increases criminal motivations.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Survey Instrumentation

To most effectively test differential association theory, we would develop a survey instrumentation with approximately 50 questions including a dependent variable that measures aggravated assault, a set of questions that measure favorable definitions, conventionality, peer attitudes as well as behaviors, and acceptance. Beyond theoretically relevant questions, we would also include measures of assault victimization in hopes of gleaning valuable insight about this understudied campus topic. Below, we outline each of the measures in more detail.

Dependent Variable

Assault

Our proposed dependent variable would measure aggravated assault. To be clear, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program defines *aggravated assault* as, "an unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of

inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury." Furthermore, aggravated assaults generally involve the use, display, or threat of a weapon such as gun or knife for the purpose of causing death or serious personal injury. By contrast, *simple assault* refers to cases in which the victim did not sustain serious bodily injury and did not involve the use of a weapon like a firearm or knife (Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States* 2012). Therefore, our survey would be careful not to confuse aggravated and simple assault. To measure aggravated assault respondents would be asked if they had physically injured a person on campus in a non-sexual manner over the past 12 months either by punching them, kicking or stomping them, striking them with an object (stick, bat, gun), or brandishing a gun or knife at them. Responses to this question would be coded 0 (No) and 1 (Yes). If a student answered "Yes," we would include three contingent questions to determine (a) the relationship between the respondent and their victim (intimate partner; acquaintance, close friend; acquaintance, non-friend; stranger; or other), (b) whether the respondent was under the influence of a substance at the time of the aggravated assault (alcohol; recreational drug; prescribed drug; or not under the influence), and (c) the location of the assault.

Independent Variables

Definitions Favorable

Consistent with prior tests of Sutherland's theory, we would include independent variables that measured key concepts of differential association including (a) definitions favorable to delinquency, (b) conventionality, (c) peer associations, and (d) perceptions of acceptance (Hoffman, 2002; Matsueda, 1982; Matsueda and Heimer, 1987; Tittle et al., 1986). Nine questions would measure definitions favorable to delinquency. Specifically, respondents would be asked if they believed it was acceptable to physically assault (punch, kick, strike with

an object, brandish a gun or knife at someone) someone who (a) verbally disrespects them or (b) as a means to resolve disputes. Two questions would ask participants if they believed it was acceptable to give someone recreational drugs or alcohol for the purpose of getting them high or drug in order to have sex with them. Finally, we would use a set of questions that asked students if they believed it was acceptable to use one of five different recreational drugs (marijuana; cocaine; methamphetamine; heroine; or prescription drugs). Response categories would utilize a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly agree, I think it is acceptable to … through (5) Strongly disagree, I do not think it is acceptable. It should be noted that the questions related to the use of drugs or alcohol to elicit sex and those pertaining to the acceptability of drug use would be used to measure analogous deviant attitudes. Research indicates that offenders exhibit versatile criminal behaviors and do not specialize in particular deviant act (Bursik 1980; Wolfgang et al. 1972). We therefore use these questions to determine if positive attitudes toward these acts are correlated with likelihood to participate in aggravated assault.

Conventionality

Similar to Hoffman (2002), we would measure conventionality by asking respondents if they believed it was important to achieve academic success. We would rely on a 5-point Likert scale for this question which ranged from (1) strongly agree, I think it is important to achieve academic success to (5) strongly disagree, I do not think it is important to achieve academic success.

Peer Association

In order to capture the influence of peer association, we would create ten attitudinal and four behavioral questions. The attitudinal questions would ask students if their closest friends on

campus had favorable definitions toward certain deviant behaviors. Specifically, participants would be asked to carefully consider their peers attitudes and gauge whether or not their closest friends on campus would believe it is acceptable to physically assault someone who (a) verbally disrespects them or (b) to resolve conflicts. In addition, respondents would be asked if their closest friends on campus would feel it was acceptable to give someone drugs or alcohol for the purpose of getting them high or drunk in order to have sex. Finally, we would ask participants if they believed their closest friends thought it was acceptable to use one of five recreational drugs (marijuana; cocaine; methamphetamine; heroine; or prescription drugs). We would also include a measure of peer conventionality and ask students if they believed their closest friends thought academic success was important. For each of these questions, we would rely on a 5-point Likert scale including (1) strongly agree, my closest friends think it is acceptable or important … through (5) strongly disagree, my closest friends do not think it is acceptable or important…

Peer behavioral questions would ask respondents if their closest friends had engaged in specific deviant acts. For instance, three questions would ask students if any of their closest friends been arrested, charged, or convicted of a (a) violent, (b) property, or (c) drug related offense. One question would ask participants if they had ever witnessed any of their closest friends on campus physically assault another person. The response categories to these series of questions would be 0 (No) and 1 (Yes).

Perceived Acceptance

A final set of theoretical questions would measure Sutherland's concept of perceived acceptance. Similar to Tittle et al. (1986), we would use questions that determined the amount of respect a participant would lose if they were convicted of committing a physical non-sexual assault. In particular, students would be asked if they would lose respect among (a) closest

friends on campus, (b) closest friends outside of campus, (c) immediate family, (d) spouse/partner, (e) coworkers, professional colleagues, or (f) authority figures (teachers, professors, boss, and pastor). Responses for these inquiries would include a 5-point Likert scale: (1) I would lose a great amount of respect, (2) Some respect, (3) Very little respect, (4) I would not lose, and (5) No opinion.

Control Variables

Our survey questionnaire would also include a total of seven demographic control variables to assess any differences related to aggressive behaviors, attitudes, or experiences. We would ask students to identify their (a) gender, (b) classification, (c) race/ethnicity, (d) age, (e) relationship status, (f) membership in campus sponsored organizations or groups, and (g) friends they spend the most time with. We would measure gender by asking whether a participant was a (a) male or (b) female. Student classification would be measured using the following categories: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Graduate Student, or Other (Explain). For race or ethnicity, we would ask students to check all that applied among the categories of White, Non-Hispanic, Black (African-American, African, or Caribbean), Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Other (Explain). Relationship status would be measured using the following categories: Single; Partner (boyfriend or girlfriend); Co-habiting (currently living with their partner); or Married. Campus sponsored organization and group membership would include the following responses: Greek organization (fraternity or sorority); Campus sponsored athletic team (varsity, intramural); Campus sponsored student organization; Other (Explain); and None. Finally, we would query respondents about their closest friends. In particular, students would be asked to select from one of the following choices: Greek organization (fraternity or sorority); Campus sponsored athletic team (varsity, intramural); Campus sponsored student organization; Friends

from housing (dormitory, apartment); Friends from class; Family members; Friends from work; Friends from my neighborhood or high school; Other (Explain); and None.

We would also include questions unrelated to Sutherland's theory but nonetheless valuable from a subject matter standpoint. We would ask respondents if they have been a victim of an aggravated assault while on campus. To capture aggravated assault victimization we would ask students if they had been physically injured over the past 12 months while on campus by someone who had punched them, kicked or stomped them, struck them with an object (stick, bat, gun), or brandished a gun or knife at them. Responses to these questions would be coded 0 (No) and 1 (Yes). If a student answered "Yes," we would include four contingent questions to determine (a) the gender of the offender (male; female; unknown), (b) the relationship between the respondent and the offender (intimate partner; acquaintance, close friend; acquaintance, non-friend; stranger; or other), (c) whether the respondent was under the influence of a substance at the time of the assault (alcohol; recreational drug; prescribed drug; or not under the influence), and (d) the location of the assault. We believe these set of questions could potentially lend valuable insight into the characteristics of aggravated assault on campus.

Survey implementation

We propose that a computer-based self-report survey would be most effective testing differential association theory. With the increased presence of computers and access to the Internet, the use of web-based surveys to collect data among student populations has grown exponentially (Kalogeraki 2011; Raghupathy and Hahn-Smith 2013). The trend toward these surveys is necessarily related to the advantages they offer. First, web-based surveys allow for more cost-effective data collection that yields immediate results. When administering computer-oriented surveys, researchers do not have to pay for mailing, printing, postage, travel, or data

entry costs. Since web-based surveys possess the ability to instantaneously store and categorize information, researchers do not have to wait for the surveys to be mailed back and then manually entered into a software analysis program. Another advantage of web-based surveys is its ability to reach national and international audiences, thus giving researchers access to geographically and culturally diverse sample populations (Kalogeraki, 2011). The anonymity of computer-based surveys is yet another benefit. To the extent that web-based surveys can ensure privacy, researchers can expect higher response rates and reduced social desirability bias (Kalogeraki 2011; Krohn et al. 2010; Raghupathy and Hahn-Smith 2013). Since respondents can complete web-based surveys in the absence of a researcher or interviewer, they tend to offer more honest feedback because they do not have to fear disclosing potentially sensitive or damaging information about themselves directly to someone else. Computer-based surveys are also equipped with software question programs that can elicit higher response rates. Web-based surveys possess the ability to display one question at a time so respondents are not overwhelmed and feel daunted by a viewing several pages of questions all at once (Raghupathy and Hahn-Smith 2013). Furthermore, automated skip or branching questions can be programmed into the survey so respondents do have to filter through a series of questions that are not applicable to them (Kalogeraki 2011; Krohn et al. 2010). In addition to computer-based questionnaires, the use self-report surveys offer two salient benefits (Krohn et al. 2010). First, self-report surveys have historically been used to capture underreporting and inherent biases in official police or court data that tends to only capture criminal acts of ethnicity minority groups or the lower classes (Sutherland, 1947). Secondly, self-report surveys have been essential for understanding the etiology of criminal behavior (Krohn et al. 2010). That is, self-report surveys have been

instrumental in capturing the importance of social processes and interactions that influence criminal behaviors.

While learning theory research has concentrated only on fraternities or athletic teams, we contend this focus has been too narrow and that any student who associates with friends that exhibit aggressive attitudes or behaviors would be equally likely to commit assaultive behaviors. Thus, a sample of the general student population would be prudent in identifying the importance of peer association on individual aggressive behaviors. An ideal target population would be residential college students attending larger research universities that tend to attract a more national student body. Residential students or those that live on a college campus are more likely to be enrolled full-time, be members of Greek organizations, utilize campus facilities including recreational centers or dining halls, and participate more fully in campus sponsored social or sporting events (Newbold et al. 2011). Therefore, a robust test of differential association theory should ideally target a student body population most likely to interact with their peers on campus. By contrast, we fear that a sample population that includes too many commuter students attending smaller more localized universities would be less likely to yield evidence of peer interactions. Research indicates that commuter students are less likely to participate in campus activities and less inclined to interact with other students or faculty (Newbold et al. 2011). Such students must limit their time on campus because of non-school obligations including work and family responsibilities. Furthermore, work obligations or financial strain prevent commuter students from continuously enrolling in college from semester to semester which further limits their participation in campus life (Newbold et al. 2011).

To reach residential college students, we would propose contacting various department chairs (via email or phone) and gauge their willingness to use an email Listserve to contact their

majors and provide them with information about the survey. Researchers should attempt to contact department chairs representing a multitude of majors so as to ensure a diverse cross-section of students. The email distributed to the majors should include (a) a brief description of the survey, (b) an informed consent statement complete with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality as well as notice of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and (c) a link to the web-based survey. To be clear, our proposed survey ensure anonymity since it does not ask students to disclose any personal information about themselves such as their name, address, phone numbers, email address, or university they are currently attending.

Hypotheses

Using differential association theory and the following survey instrumentation as a reference, we can derive four general hypotheses related to impact of favorable definitions of crime, conventionality, peer associations, and perceived acceptance on assaultive behaviors by college students. First, we would hypothesize that students who hold favorable attitudes toward the use of assault and other deviant acts will be more likely to physically assault another student on campus. Second, we would posit that students who hold less conventional attitudes toward academic success will be more inclined to assault another student. Next, we would predict that students who associate with peers that hold favorable criminal attitudes or behaviors will be most likely to engage in interpersonal violence on campus. Finally, we would hypothesize that students who do not fear losing respect among their family, closest peers, or associates will be more likely to physically assault another student.

LIMITATIONS

In this paper, we offered a research proposal to better understand the dynamics of assault on college campuses. Specifically, we utilized Edwin Sutherland's differential association to

illustrate the extent to which peer associations can potentially influence participation in assaultive behaviors. While we believe the survey instrumentation outlined in this paper would yield meaning data and findings, researchers are likely to encounter some limitations. As is the case with any self-report survey, there is always a concern about underreporting or invalid participant responses. However, the use of web-based surveys have generally been considered reliable and valid, especially when studying sensitive behaviors like drug use or criminal activity because of the anonymity it provides (Ramo et al, 2011; Kalogeraki 2011; Raghupathy and Hahn-Smith 2013). Another potential concern is related to the sample population, particularly students who may have been suspended from school because they committed an aggravated or attempted aggravated assault. Such students would therefore be omitted from our sample population. At the same time, however, we trust that the self-report survey would capture students who participated in an assault on campus but were not apprehended or punished. Indeed, one of the primary benefits of self-report surveys is its ability to measure deviant behaviors not officially reported to agencies of social control like campus police (Krohn et al. 2010). Notwithstanding these limitations, we strongly believe the proposal offers a good starting point for analyzing an important yet understudied subject.

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